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GLAMOROUS NEW GLOXINIAS • KEEP YOUR AFRICAN VIOLETS FLOWERING

# Flower Grower

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# Brighten your window with Gloxinias

By **ALBERT and TRUDY BUELL**

*Photographs for FLOWER GROWER by Roche*

**I**F you want color on your windowsill, try growing gloxinias. No other house plants can provide the interesting variations and color range of the new gloxinia hybrids, and no other plants will reward you so handsomely for the small effort it takes to flower them.

Their colors run the gamut from delicate orchid pink to darkest purple. There are ruffled pure whites, others lightly tinted; some that are finely speckled, as if by a light, airy mist; and, perhaps most striking of all, there are vivid ruffled reds. A collection of gloxinias in full bloom presents a sight not easily imagined by anyone unfamiliar with them.

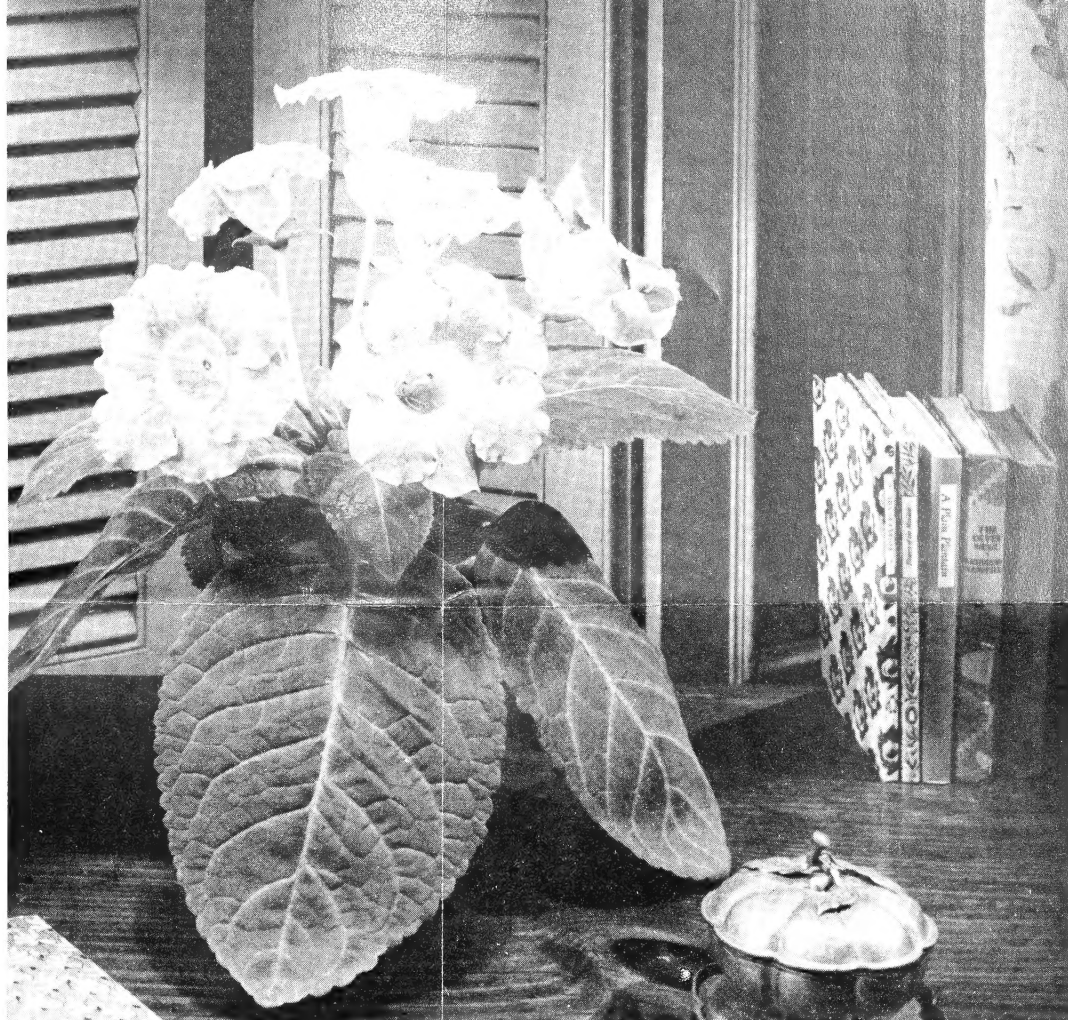
In size, no less than in color, these new hybrids are a far cry from the smallish red and purple bell-shaped flowers that were favorites of our grandmothers. Well grown plants of the larger kinds usually have flowers  $4\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 inches across, and occasionally there'll be an even larger bloom. The more floriferous though smaller-flowered kinds often have 40 flowers open at once, and one of our record plants actually had 102 flowers open at the same time.

Gloxinia leaves, too, are both attractive and interesting. In some varieties they're nearly smooth, in others extremely hairy. They also vary a great deal in size, some measuring as much as 14 inches long and 10 inches wide.

The easiest way to start a gloxinia collection is to purchase potted plants or dormant tubers. If you buy tubers, the soil mixture is the first thing to consider. Gloxinias like a rich, fibrous soil, and we have found the following mixture satisfactory: one-third good garden loam, one-third compost or leaf-mold, and one-third made up of half peatmoss and half sand. We add a 4-inch pot of bonemeal to each bushel of this potting mixture, or a little less than a cupful to a 12-quart pail of soil mixture. Tubers  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches across or less should be potted in 5-inch pots. Larger tubers should be given 6-, 7- or 8-inch pots. About an inch of crushed charcoal in the bottom of the pot insures good drainage.

Gloxinias seem to do best in a south or east window where they receive all the sun possible during the winter

*(Continued on back page)*



Hybrid gloxinias of today are a spectacle to behold. Large-flowered types have individual blossoms measuring up to  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches across. Some kinds may have as many as 40 blossoms. The leaves may also measure 14 by 10 inches.



Modern gloxinias range in color from light lavender to dark purple. Some are speckled like the pink and white above.

## Cover Picture

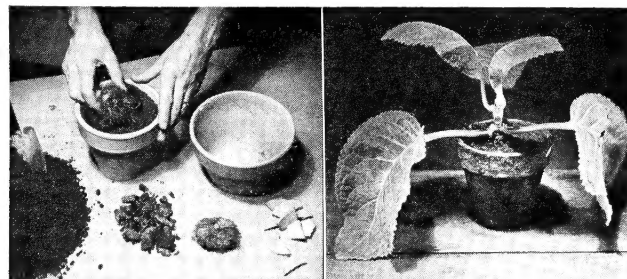
The gloxinias pictured on the cover are hybrids developed by the authors. A is a heavily ruffled red. B, C and D show the varying degrees of red and pink speckling possible: B is completely speckled; in C the speckling runs almost solid in the throat, and D is delicately speckled on petal-edge and in throat.



Roche

## HOW TO GROW GLOXINIAS

### ... from Tubers



Place drainage and an inch of charcoal in bottom of pot. Use fibrous soil composed of 1/3 compost or leafmold, 1/3 good garden loam and 1/3 equal parts of coarse sand and peatmoss.

When foliage dies down and plant shows no sign of new growth it should be put in a dark place, cellar or closet, to rest. Don't let pot dry out, water occasionally during rest.

### ... from Cuttings

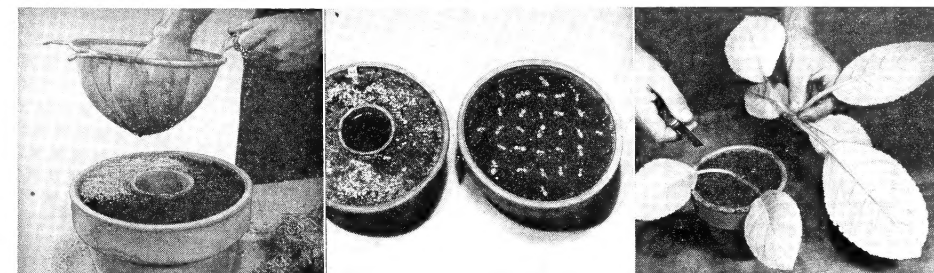


Select green, robust leaves for cuttings while plant is still blooming. Cut leaf as close to the main stem as possible, where leaf-stem is hard. Cuttings always come true to color.

Leaves can be inserted in a bowl, terrarium or large bulb pan, *above*. The authors root their leaves in coarse sand, but vermiculite or peatmoss can be used with much success.

Tubers form on the base of the leaf. Four stages in tuber development are shown *above*. When tuber has formed, *right*, it should be potted. It will bloom the following spring.

### ... from Seed



The authors sow their seed on soil composed of compost, good loam, coarse sand and peatmoss. The seeds are then covered with a thin layer of sphagnum moss screened through a strainer.

Seeds germinate in six to ten days. Plants in pot *left* are ready for transplanting; pot *right*, transplanted seedlings. Seed-pot is watered through corked small pot in center.

Plants grown from seeds sown in the summer will flower the next spring. The plant will bloom again in the fall if main stem is cut off close to soil level, leaving two leaves.



months. In the summer they like a little shade. Some successful growers recommend watering them from below, as is usually recommended for African violets, but we have always watered them at the surface of the soil. We apply water until it runs out the bottom of the pot, and we do not water again until the soil surface shows signs of drying out. Thus the soil is never waterlogged, a condition which may result in failure of the buds to develop.

Fertilizer requirements during the growing season will depend upon the fertility of the loam and compost (or leafmold) used in the potting mixture. We apply liquid fertilizer, prepared from a complete commercial fertilizer, once or twice during the summer.

After blooming during the spring and summer, gloxinias should be given a short rest. This should start in September or October. Our method is to repot the tubers as soon as the plants die down and before storing them for the rest period. Thus handled, the potted tubers can be kept in the basement or in a dark closet until new growth starts. During the resting period they should be kept just slightly moist.

The new cycle may start at any time, depending upon the nature of the individual plant. Some tubers are very slow to start, while others take almost no rest at all. Occasionally, in fact, a tuber will send up a new shoot before the old top dies down, and we have found that such growth will develop into just as good a plant as if the tuber had taken a two-month rest before making a new top. If no growth is visible in four months, the amount of water given should be gradually increased.

We have found that plants which produce an early crop of blooms in the spring can be cut off just above the first pair of leaves and thus made to produce another good showing of flowers in 10 to 16 weeks. This second flowering, however, should not be allowed to run beyond September. The plant should then be given less water, in preparation for its rest.

#### **Gloxinias from Seed**

Gloxinias sinningia can be easily raised from seed without difficulty and will develop into beautiful flowering plants within seven to ten months. Seed sown in

July produces the best plants. Any of the accepted methods of germinating fine seed and handling small seedlings will be found satisfactory. Our favorite method is illustrated on page 3. In the center of the seed pot we insert a much smaller pot, the drainage hole of which is corked, and this small pot is kept full of water. The water slowly seeps through the sides of the small pot and thus keeps the soil in the seed pot moist. The soil in the seed pot should be loose, not packed down.

The seed will germinate in six to ten days, and the seedlings should be transplanted as soon as they are large enough to handle. Repotting into larger pots is of course necessary as the plants develop. During the fall, winter and spring the plants should be kept at a night temperature of around 62°.

Gloxinia seed should be fresh, inasmuch as its viability decreases greatly after it is a year old. It's always advisable, therefore, to procure seed from a reliable source.

Leaf cuttings started in the spring or summer will usually produce tubers that flower the following year. Occasionally a cutting started in March or April will send up a shoot within six or eight weeks which will flower during the same growing season.

Our experience indicates that the leaf should be cut as close as possible to the stem of the plant, where the leaf-stem is hard. We have found that a leaf with a hard stem will root more quickly and will form a better tuber than one that has a soft succulent stem.

We usually root cuttings in coarse sand, since we have access to a sand bank. Vermiculite has proved its merit, however, and peatmoss also has been found satisfactory. A goldfish bowl or terrarium seems to be the ideal container for gloxinia cuttings, especially in the dry atmosphere of a steam-heated home, since it keeps the air around the cuttings continuously moist. The cuttings will usually root quite satisfactorily, however, in an ordinary bulb pan.

As soon as a tuber develops at the base of the cutting it can be potted up—first into a 4-inch pot and later on into larger pots as necessary.

It is also possible to root gloxinia leaves by slitting them across the veins and laying them on the rooting medium. At each break in the leaf a plant should

form. Another method is to cut the leaf in sections, splitting the main vein. In both these methods, however, you run the risk of losing your cuttings due to decay, and so we would not recommend them for choice varieties, or at least not until you have done a little experimenting with leaves of commonplace kinds.

Regardless of how you choose to root gloxinia leaves, be sure to take them only while they are a good healthy green and in good condition—that is, while the plant is blooming.

#### **Insects and Other Troubles**

Thrips, which cause a mottling or flecking of the leaves, are likely to attack gloxinias at one time or another. They can be controlled with DDT, used with precaution and as directed by the manufacturer. Aphids or plant lice can be controlled with nicotine sulphate. Mealy bugs, which have a cottony appearance, prefer other plants but occasionally attack gloxinias. Dabbing them with rubbing alcohol will take care of them. If cyclamen mites, which cause deformed leaves and stunted growth, find their way to your gloxinias, the best remedy is to cut off the plant as close to the tuber as possible and burn the old top.

The question most often asked is, Why do some plants become "leggy" or "spindly"? This condition is almost always due to insufficient light. Strangely, however, some plants need considerably more light than others, and so a spindly plant should always be given the sunniest spot you have. Occasionally we've found plants that just won't get over their legginess until the sun gets higher and the days longer sometime in March.

Curling of the leaves of some plants is also usually due to inadequate light or to insufficient space. This curling does not affect the flowering of the plant, but it does detract from its appearance.

No gloxinia tuber should be condemned and discarded until you have made a sincere effort to understand its individual requirements and have given it every chance to prove its worthiness. A well grown gloxinia is the handsomest house plant you could own, and you'll find that occasionally a little extra fussing really pays off. ►

*Reprinted from*

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*Especially for*

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80